

# Nov - Dec 2019 Newsletter

Last night, there came a frost, which has done great damage to my garden.... It is sad that Nature will play such tricks on us poor mortals, inviting us with sunny smiles to confide in her, and then, when we are entirely within her power, striking us to the heart.

~Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*

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## Co-President's Message

Welcome to the Perth & District Horticultural Society's Christmas Pot-Luck and Annual General Meeting, and our last meeting of this year.

As co-president of our Society, it has been an eventful year. I am not one to stand in front of people and talk coherently but being co-president has allowed me to do so. So for 2020, I will stand as the President of the Society. I appreciate Madeline's guidance and knowledge over the past year.

I want to take this time to thank members of our Society who have done an outstanding job this year. Thank you to Lynda Haddon for organizing the team of volunteers that maintain the Community Gardens. Lynda organized a tour of the Museum gardens as well as the museum itself in August. The gardens are well-maintained and something for our Society to be proud of. The history of the museum was fascinating, and I quite enjoyed it. Our Society also takes care of the Cenotaph garden on Drummond Street, and the Flag garden on Gore Street, past the bridge. Thank you to David Ar-

cher for ordering the plants for this garden.

Many thanks to David Archer for organizing the plant sale, and our army of volunteers who came out to help. Also, the members who donated plants – without your generous donations, we would not have a plant sale. The plant sale is our primary fundraising function for the Society, and this helps to offset the costs for our Junior Garden program, which is always well received in the schools.

Robin McIntosh and Sandi Sissons for organizing the Junior Gardeners program and making it a success. Ruth for her green thumb. We appreciate all the volunteers that participated in this program. Every year we get feedback from our parents

Aira Kaduc as the Flower show coordinator – writing the schedule and setting up the shows and arranging judges. Thank you to all the participants in the show.

Richard Catchpaw, for opening his magnificent Daylily and Hosts gardens to our members in July. It was well worth the visit, over 800 different daylilies and hostas.

Special thanks to our Executive for their dedication to the Society. We would like to have a few



Lanark Orchid

Renals

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District #2 of the  
Ontario Horticultural  
Association

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**Co-Presidents:** Linda Bartlett, Madeline Archer • **Newsletter:** Irene Hofmann

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more members for the Board to help organize the Society and keep it running smoothly. It is not a difficult task. We meet seven or eight times a year for an hour or so to plan for our Society membership meetings and other events the Society is involved in.

I have a great appreciation and gratitude for Irene Hofmann for creating the society newsletter for the past 21 years. This November issue will be the final edition of the Society Newsletter unless someone steps forward to continue as editor. There are eight editions a year, and you would be collecting articles that you feel would be of interest to the membership and any upcoming events and then producing a 4-page newsletter as well as sending the files to be photocopied. If you are interested in becoming the editor and are not familiar with a page layout program but can work in Word, please let me know, and I will create a template for you to use in Word.

We are thinking of creating Social Media pages (Facebook and Instagram) and looking for someone to take on this task and keep our members posted regularly.

We are also looking for a Refreshment Coordinator to take on the task of making sure we have drinks and contacting people to bring treats to our meetings.

The Board is looking at revamping the way that we set up our Annual Plant sale. We want to change things around wherein members would dig up their plants, put in bags, boxes, pots, etc., and drop them off at plant potting up location. We would then have a group of volunteers to pot up plants and prepare them for the plant sale for the first three weeks in May (3 to 6 sessions). The Society will provide soil, etc. This gives those who have lots of plants to share but do not like potting up plants to have the opportunity to get these plants to the plant sale and then get some volunteers who like to nurture plants, pot them up and take care of them until the plant sale. To set up the Plant Sale this way, we need someone to volunteer a barn, shed or garage central to Perth that we could use from the beginning of May until the Plant Sale. If you would like to volunteer this space for the Society, please me know.

In closing, I wish everyone a Happy and Safe Holiday Season and winter. We look forward to seeing you on February 11, 2020, with our Guest Speaker, Carol Onion, who will bring us a refreshing view of what will be new for 2020.

If you would like to volunteer for any of the

tasks mentioned above or have any suggestions for the Society, please contact me by email at perthhortpres@gmail.com or by phone at 613-283-8027.

*Linda Bartlett*

## Indoor Winter Gardening

*Dr. Leonard Perry, Horticulture Professor Emeritus,  
University of Vermont*

How to treat unplanted spring-flowering bulbs, an amaryllis when through flowering, and houseplants dropping leaves, are some of the common indoor gardening questions this time of year. Many also ask if there are food crops that you can grow indoors during winter.

If you purchased spring-flowering bulbs this fall, but didn't get them all planted, what should you do with them? Such bulbs really can't be held over until spring, or for another year, so go on and plant them in pots. If you wait until spring to plant them outside, or in pots, they will start growing with no roots, so won't be successful. Planting them now allows roots to form before they start growing tops.

To grow roots, and receive the cold they need to flower, place potted bulbs in a cool (40 degrees F or less) but non-freezing location, ideally for 10 to 12 weeks. This could be an unheated garage or basement. Or, you could place them outside in a protected area, covered with plenty of bark mulch, straw, or soil. Then remove when growth starts in spring.

If you got an amaryllis for the holidays, how should you treat it once it has finished blooming? Once the flower stalk is finished, leaves emerge. Keep the bulb watered and fertilized lightly through the winter. This helps it build up reserves for next year's bloom. You can then place the potted bulb outdoors in summer, keeping it watered if needed. Then in early fall bring it indoors, and decrease watering over several weeks until stopped altogether. Remove leaves as they die back, and let the bulb "rest" for about eight weeks. Then resume watering.

If you had an amaryllis, and followed this process but got no bloom this year, it may not have built up enough food reserves during the year. If you just got leaves, keep the bulb watered and fertilized, and hopefully this coming year it will bloom once again. Sometimes after being "forced" they require a couple years before re-blooming.

If you have a houseplant, such as a jade plant, and the leaves are turning yellow and dropping off, what can you do? With a jade plant, leaves dropping off is likely a sign that the soil is staying too wet. As with most houseplants, too little water is better than too much. If in doubt, don't water, especially with "succulents" such as the jade plant. Make sure the plant is not in a pot with no drainage, nor sitting in a saucer of water. Using a clay pot, which dries out faster than plastic, also is good for plants that don't need much water.

Make sure with houseplants that there is not a layer of gravel or pebbles in the bottom of the pot. Some recommend this for drainage, but in reality it only creates an area where water gathers and roots rot, or decreases the amount of soil in the pot.

If you're eager to grow some of your own food, or at least to see something green this time of year, are there any crops you can grow indoors? In addition to some herbs and sprouts, microgreens would be a good choice. These simply are the immature greens of crops such as lettuce and their relatives, leafy vegetables, and even some edible flowers and buckwheat. Some catalogs sell special microgreen mixes, often with various flavors and colors of leaves. Harvest leaves when plants are only two inches tall, only two or three weeks after they germinate. Grow in seed sowing mixes in shallow containers. They need at least 4 hours of direct sun a day, as in a south-facing windowsill, or you can grow them under plant grow-light fixtures.

## Dirt Is Actually Good For You: Who Knew?

By The Laidback Gardener

When Ma scolded you for getting dirty playing in the yard, claiming you'd probably catch some vile disease, she was probably wrong. In fact, recent studies are showing that getting your hands (and feet!) dirty is actually good for you.

A bacteria naturally found in soil and dirt almost everywhere on the planet, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, actually activates the release of serotonin and dopamine in your brain. Dopamine affects your emotions, stimulating feelings of pleasure and dulling pain, while serotonin regulates your humor, social behavior, libido, memory and sleep. So, when you come indoors after gardening feeling refreshed, it's quite possible a soil

bacterium is the cause.

Scientists suspect that *M. vaccae* is not alone. That other common soil bacteria may also contribute to the feeling of well-being that gardening gives. So, more joy, improved relaxation and less pain, and all this without the side effects and risk of chemical dependency of pills like Prozac.

Such antidepressant microbes in soil are also being studied for improving cognitive function, controlling Crohn's disease and helping to treat rheumatoid arthritis.

This was discovered accidentally when oncologist Dr. Mary O'Brien tried administering killed *M. vaccae* to boost the immune system of patients suffering from lung cancer, but the results went well beyond what she expected. Not only did it indeed stimulate their immune system, as she hoped, but patients reported feeling happier and more energetic and experiencing less pain.

According to a later study by neuroscientists Dorothy Matthews and Susan Jenks, tests on laboratory mice show they are less anxious and more relaxed after treatment with *M. vaccae*. In fact, they even seem to be smarter, finding their way through a maze twice as fast as untreated rodents. The effect is lasting, too, still present two weeks later.

When you garden, you absorb beneficial microbes through your skin and through your lungs as you breathe. So what are you waiting for? Get out outdoors and garden! Preferably barefoot and certainly without wearing gloves!

## Weed Barrier: Pros/Cons

Amanda Carrigan, Master Gardener

Landscape fabric, geotextile, and the similar products sold as weed barrier, are usually woven, felted, or perforated black plastic sheets. It may sound like the magic solution to weed problems, but consider carefully before choosing this option. On the plus side, it acts like a mulch—it inhibits weeds and weed seeds underneath it from growing and decreases moisture loss and soil erosion. When adding stone to gardens, such as riverwash, landscape fabric may be put underneath the stone – its function is to keep the stone and soil separate.

On the negative side, though, consider the following. Covering the ground in black plastic makes it impossible for earthworms to live under there – they need to come up to the surface.

And despite the perforations or the porous nature of a woven or felted fabric, less water and nutrients get through it to your plants' roots. So, over time, the soil under weed barrier becomes compacted and nutrient poor. In a garden, you need to either wrap the fabric around the plants or cut holes in it to put the plants in – which leaves gaps for the weeds to grow. Weeds can also sneak through where pieces of the weed barrier overlap, and weed seeds can sprout in mulch or dirt on top of the weed barrier (the plastic is not attractive, so it is usually covered in mulch or similar). Roots from weeds can also grow into the plastic, which makes it impossible to eradicate them.

From an environmental perspective, there are other concerns. The barrier does start breaking down over time under UV light, leading to plastic bits and microplastics in your garden. Also, the edges of woven fabric types often fray, and the exposed strands of tough plastic are a potential wildlife hazard. In a garden bed with frayed plastic exposed, I once found a dead bird with its legs tangled in the strands!

In summary? Weed barrier may be useful in applications where you will be putting stone on top, keeping the fabric well covered, and not making many changes thereafter. In a garden setting, the payoff isn't worth the trouble. If you have persistent perennial weeds, a better solution would be to thickly layer newspaper and cardboard, wet it, and cover it with an organic mulch layer. It will last long enough to kill most weeds or grass, but will break down and contribute to soil over time, and allow you to plant, feed, water, and weed your garden without causing trouble.

## Garden Myth: You Can Tell The Sex Of Peppers By The Number Of Lobes

*By Larry Hodgson*

**Question:** My grocer told me that you can tell male and female peppers apart by the number of lobes it has, but I don't remember his explanation. What's the difference between the two? And how are the different sexes used?

Linda R.

**Answer:** In fact, there is no such thing as a male or female pepper. It's a garden myth like

so many others. It's really unfortunate that your grocer has been sharing this misinformation with his clients.

The story behind this belief is that the typical bell pepper (*Capsicum annuum*) has 4 lobes (4 bumps at the base of the fruit and 4 compartments if you cut it open), but there are some varieties with only 3 lobes. And according to the myth, the pepper with 4 lobes would be a female and its taste would be sweeter, making it more interesting for eating raw, as in salads and sandwiches. The 3-lobed pepper would be male, with a more intense taste, and would be better suited to cooking.

Obviously, that's simply not true and it's easy to prove otherwise. Just cut the fruit open and look inside. Are there seeds in the fruit? Of course! However, and if there are seeds, the fruit is essentially "pregnant." So, the fruit can't be male, can it? A male fruit (if such a thing existed) would have no seeds at all.

In fact, you can't really talk about sex when it comes to a fruit. It's just not sexual, no more so than would be a finger or a toe on a human. And any botanist reading this would already have cringed when I suggested a fruit might be pregnant! Actually, the flower at the origin of pepper fruit was in fact bisexual: male and female. By extension, if you absolutely want to give a sex to a fruit, a bell pepper too would be bisexual.

### *What About the Number of Lobes?*

In fact, bell peppers, other sweet peppers and hot peppers (all simply forms of the highly variable species *Capsicum annuum*) may have 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 lobes, even more. The number is largely determined by the genetics of the plant. The typical bell pepper, rather cubic in shape, has 4 lobes, but sometimes 3 or 5. There are 3-lobed sweet pepper lines (sweet Hungarian or banana peppers, for example, which do tend to be stronger in taste than the average bell), but they are less well known. The shape of the fruit has no direct effect on the taste and the fruit produced can be used raw or cooked, regardless of the number of lobes.

Each pepper strain ('Olympus', 'California Wonder', 'Gourmet', etc.) has its own taste. Obviously, some are sweeter than others. So, when you buy seeds or plants for your vegetable garden, read its description to see if the promised taste is one likely to suit you. But there's no need to mix sex into the equation!